

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2010

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY MASTER COASTAL TRAIL PLAN

File No. 09-004

Project Manager: Laura Engeman

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission to prepare a Master Coastal Trail Plan and environmental analysis for the Santa Cruz County segment of the California Coastal Trail.

LOCATION: Santa Cruz County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photographs of Santa Cruz County](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$250,000 (two hundred fifty thousand dollars) to the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) for the preparation of a Master Coastal Trail Plan (the Plan) and environmental analysis for the Santa Cruz County segment of the California Coastal Trail/Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the commencement of work and the disbursement of funds, SCCRTC shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a detailed work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
2. To the extent appropriate, SCCRTC shall ensure that the Plan designs are consistent with the Conservancy’s ‘Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development’ and all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines for disabled access.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
3. The project will serve greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) is requesting \$250,000 from the Conservancy to prepare a master coastal trail plan and programmatic environmental impact report for the entire Santa Cruz County segment of the California Coastal Trail, also known as the northern Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Network. The Santa Cruz County Master Coastal Trail Plan (the Plan) would guide the development of approximately 38 miles of continuous bicycle and pedestrian pathways extending from the San Mateo-Santa Cruz County line down to the southern Santa Cruz-Monterey County boundary, with additional spur trails leading to and from Santa Cruz coastal points of interest, transit hubs or other community access points.

Development of the Plan will include the following tasks:

- An evaluation of potential bicycle-pedestrian pathways along the Santa Cruz County coastal corridor designed to maximize coastal access, and minimize impacts to landowners, agricultural operators and natural resources;
- A list of proposed segment alignments, including a description of the conditions, property owner information, environmental constraints, and coastal access;
- Several public workshops to discuss the proposed trail alignments with relevant agencies, interest groups and the public;
- An analysis of the preferred trail segments through a programmatic environmental impact report; and
- A list of preferred and alternative trail segments identified through the workshops and a list of prioritized trail implementation tasks.

A major component of the Plan would be an evaluation of potential trail alignments along the railway right-of-way that the SCCRTC expects to purchase from Union Pacific Railroad in the late summer of 2010. The railroad right-of-way extends 31.8 miles from Davenport to the Pajaro River, just short of the entire length of the county. Since much of the right-of-way runs right along the coast and is wide enough to accommodate trains and a bicycle-pedestrian pathway, it would provide tremendous opportunity for developing a continuous trail through Santa Cruz County by providing access through private properties and agricultural lands.

The Plan would also coordinate the various coastal trail plans that have been proposed, funded, and/or constructed across the county. These include the Wilder Ranch Bicycle and Pedestrian Path, the Watsonville Slough Trails, the Rail Trail, the Coastal Trail Network and the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail. Although all of these projects share the goal of developing new accessible bicycle and pedestrian trail facilities on or near the coast, they were not always coordinated. In 2007, the SCCRTC under the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) Network consolidated the various trail projects to improve agency coordination, trail connectivity, and funding capacity.

The Santa Cruz County segment of the California Coastal Trail will serve as the northern segment of the MBSST Network. The trail would invite pedestrians and bicyclists to “experience” the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary from vantage points on land and interpretive features would foster stewardship of this natural treasure and its shoreline communities. The Transportation Agency of Monterey County recently completed a master plan for the Monterey County portion of the trail and is in the beginning stages of constructing new trail segments. The Santa Cruz County Master Trail Plan will identify trail alignments linking Santa Cruz County up to the Monterey County trail.

Site Description: The trail planning area for the Santa Cruz County segment of the California Coastal Trail/MBSST Network would extend from the San Mateo County line to the Thurwachter Bridge over the Pajaro River where it connects with the northern border of Monterey County. The area includes approximately 38 miles of shoreline with additional trail spurs to coastal access and viewpoints throughout Santa Cruz County.

Santa Cruz County has long been a favorite coastal destination in California. Valued for its surf culture, pristine beaches, abundant marine life, and historic pier and boardwalk facilities, Santa Cruz County is considered one of central California’s most popular places to live and visit. The County boasts 29 miles of beaches and shoreline that are largely protected through state and county parks. These include two state parks (Big Basin Redwoods/Rancho Del Oso and Wilder Ranch) and six state beaches (Natural Bridges, Twins Lakes, New Brighton, Seacliff, Manresa, and Sunset).

Extensive trails and the coast’s scenic wonders also support a culture of active coastal recreation, including sailing, fishing, surfing, bike riding, diving, and hiking. Skyline to Sea Trails, such as the one developed through Big Basin Redwoods Park, allow hikers and bikers to enjoy state park trails that begin in the redwoods of the Santa Cruz Mountains and end at the beach. Santa Cruz County also serves as one of the gateways to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, home to a diversity of marine habitats and a wealth of ocean life. Marine-associated activities, such as diving, whale watching, kayaking, and tide pool exploration often attract visitors looking to experience the wonders of the marine world.

Project History: In 2000, the legislature called for the establishment of the California Coastal Trail. In 2001, the California State Legislature, by way of SB 908, directed the State Coastal Conservancy to determine what was needed to complete the Coastal Trail. The ensuing report titled “Completing the California Coastal Trail” was prepared by Conservancy staff with the

participation of the Coastal Commission and State Parks, plus staff and volunteers from Coastwalk in 2003.

The Completing the Coastal Trail report identified several specific objectives along the Santa Cruz County coast including: 1) work with the SCCRTC to acquire the former railroad right-of-way and develop the multi-use trail from Davenport to Watsonville, 2) complete the environmental analysis and design of a principal trail alignment through the former Coast Dairies property in cooperation with the Trust for Public Land and others, and construct the trail, 3) work with State Parks to complete the coastal trail segment across the Gray Whale Ranch property and open the property to the public, 4) Work with Santa Cruz County to identify a trail alignment through Live Oak and work with the County, State Parks, and private landowners to identify a trail alignment from Capitola to the southern county line, and 5) encourage and assist in the completion of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail. The proposed authorization will permit the SCCRTC to evaluate preferred trail alignments, including the areas described above, and to develop a set of prioritized tasks for implementing the entire Santa Cruz County segment of the California Coastal Trail/MBSST Network.

The proposed authorization will also integrate several trail development projects that the Conservancy has supported in an effort to establish the Santa Cruz segment of the California Coastal Trail. In 2005 the Conservancy authorized up to \$10,000,000 as a reimbursable grant to SCCRTC to purchase 31.8 miles of railway right-of-way from Union Pacific. The railroad right-of-way would provide a significant opportunity for developing the Santa Cruz coastal trail since it hugs the coast for much of its span through Santa Cruz County and it is wide enough in many sections to develop a coastal trail adjacent to the tracks. This acquisition is expected to occur in the late summer of 2010 and some portion of the Conservancy reimbursable grant may be needed to complete the acquisition. In addition, in 2008, the Conservancy authorized a \$250,000 grant to the Santa Cruz Port Commission to improve coastal access along the West Jetty and designate the Harbor's coastal pathways as a segment of the California Coastal Trail. The engineering designs for the West Jetty project are now complete, and the Harbor anticipates completing the trail renovation within the next two years. The proposed master trail plan will identify potential coastal trail alignment along the railway right-of-way, incorporate developed trail such as the Harbor paths, and identify trail connections to establish continuous access from the San Mateo County line south to the Monterey County line.

PROJECT FINANCING:

California Department of Transportation (federal appropriations)*	\$250,000
Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$250,000</u>
TOTAL:	\$500,000

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for this authorization is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the

Conservancy's use of these funds for the purposes of promoting access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state. Section 75060(b) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates funding to the Conservancy for expenditure pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to assist in the development of land-based public access and, as discussed in the section found immediately below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21.

*The federal appropriations were allocated specifically for the development of the Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay coastal trails by the California Department of Transportation through the 2004 and 2005 Federal Appropriations Acts and the SAFETEA-LU program. The California Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, who administer the funds, authorized the SCCRTC to proceed with spending \$250,000 on planning for the Santa Cruz segment of the coastal trail project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21, of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31409), relating to the provision of public accessways to and along the coast .

Section 31400 provides that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline and Section 31408(a) directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail. Consistent with these sections, the Conservancy would provide funds to SCCRTC to develop plans for implementation of the California Coastal Trail throughout Santa Cruz County.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to provide grants to public entities to develop, operate and manage lands for access to and along the coast, if the accessway is determined to serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the proposed project will provide grant funds to the SCCRTC to develop a master trail plan for enhanced coastal access in Santa Cruz County to be used by both local residents and visitors from throughout the state and beyond.

Pursuant to Section 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the initial development of a public accessway and the amount of the Conservancy contribution shall be determined only after an assessment of funding generally available and other factors. The proposed contribution by the Conservancy was determined based on the consideration of the factors specified in the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines (see below), and taking into account the federal matching funds for the project that are available to the SCCRTC.

Finally, the proposed project is also consistent with Section 31400.3, under which the Conservancy is authorized to provide funds "required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division." These funds will be used for the planning and environmental analysis of the proposed Santa Cruz County trail segment.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C**, the proposed project would develop a master trail plan for

developing the Santa Cruz County segment of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network, to serve as the California Coastal Trail. When completed, this trail system would offer approximately 38 miles of continuous bike-pedestrian paths through public and private lands in the County, with additional trail spurs to coastal points of interest.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on June 4, 2009, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is championed by Congressman Sam Farr and supported by Senator Joe Simitian, UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal, City of Santa Cruz Mayor Cynthia Matthews, City of Watsonville Mayor Antonio Rivas, the Transportation Agency for Monterey County, the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Pajaro Valley Transportation Management Association, the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council, the SCCRTC's Bicycle Committee, and community organizations such as Mission: Pedestrian, Ecology Action, People Power, Bike Smart, Campaign for Sensible Transportation, and the Santa Cruz Cycling Club among others (Exhibit 3: Project Letters).
4. **Location:** The project is located within the coastal zone in Santa Cruz County.
5. **Need:** The SCCRTC has secured \$250,000 in federal appropriations for development of a master plan to be provided through the California Department of Transportation, but needs an additional \$250,000 to develop a master trail plan that would span the entire county coastline. The Conservancy has been identified as the only possible funding source.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Santa Cruz County is a significant tourist destination along the central coast, receiving over two million visitors a year. The County's coastal points of interest are enjoyed by visitors from other regions of the state and from across the nation who come to enjoy the scenic and recreational amenities this area of the coast has to offer.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Consistent with Executive Order S-13-08, the Santa Cruz Master Trail Plan shall consider a range of sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 in order to assess project vulnerability and, to the extent feasible, reduce expected risks and increase resiliency to sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** A master trail plan is needed to coordinate trail developments and evaluate all trail options including rail and other rights of way. If a master plan is not developed, trail

connection opportunities will be lost as agencies and organizations pursue implementation individually. In addition, federal appropriations secured for planning and construction need to be expended before they are lost.

10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Conflict resolution:** Bicycle and pedestrian coastal access is often limited to the shoulder of Highway 1 or requires dangerous crossing of the Highway. This project will consider establishing non-motorized coastal access pathways to eliminate these hazards.
13. **Readiness:** The SCCRTC is poised to move forward with the master trail plan and environmental review for the Santa Cruz County segment of the MBSST network.
14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy has participated in numerous projects to improve coastal access in Santa Cruz County and enhance coastal resources and waterfront facilities. The development of a master trail plan will include many of these projects and significantly expand public enjoyment of these areas.
16. **Cooperation:** This project is a cooperative effort of the SCCRTC and numerous committees and organizations, comprised of community leaders, public agencies and non-profit organizations from the Monterey Bay area.
18. **Minimization of Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** The master trail plan will greatly enhance non-motorized transportation options for residents and visitors accessing Santa Cruz coastal areas or the county’s coastal communities. The trail plan will, therefore, contribute to the community’s efforts to encourage emission free commuting and transportation through the county’s public bicycle and pedestrian trail systems.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE CONSERVANCY’S STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSWAY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:

As a condition of approval, the project will be designed to be consistent with the Coastal Conservancy’s Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development. In particular:

Standard No. 1. Protect the Public and Coastal Resources: The proposed project will prepare trail plans designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms, to be subordinate to the setting’s character, to prevent unwarranted hazards to the land and public safety, and to protect environmentally sensitive habitats.

Standard No. 2. Correct Hazards: The proposed project will prepare trail plans designed to correct unsafe conditions such as bicycle and pedestrian use of Highway 1 along the Santa Cruz County shoreline. The trail plan will also identify potential hazards throughout the trail planning area and evaluate options for avoiding these through alternative routes or trail design.

Standard No. 3. Accessway Easements: The proposed project will prepare trail plans for the railway right-of-way as well as other easements acquired for coastal access purposes in Santa Cruz County. Evaluation of trail alignments within the easements will consider appropriate trail width and wheelchair accessibility.

Standards No. 4. Privacy: The proposed master trail plan will consider landowner privacy concerns through the trail planning process.

Standard No. 5. Environmentally Sensitive Areas: The proposed project will prepare trail plans designed to ensure that adverse effects on natural resources are avoided to the extent feasible.

Standard No. 6 & 7. Lateral and Vertical Accessways: The master trail planning process will plan lateral and vertical accessways along the Santa Cruz County shoreline. These plans will consider siting issues, such as limiting the construction of facilities, and establishing buffers between coastal trails and agricultural crops.

Standard No. 8. Trails: The proposed project will prepare trail plans designed to provide continuous public access either along a coastal bluff or linking inland recreational and transportation facilities to the shoreline.

Standard No. 9. Scenic Overlooks: The entire length of the trail will be planned to take advantage of scenic views as feasible, a primary goal of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network.

Standard No. 10. Coastal Bikeways. The proposed project will identify trail segments appropriate for bicycle use. The trail plans will be designed to maximize the development of shared multi-use pathways for the exclusive use of bicycles and pedestrians.

Standard No. 12. Support Facilities: The proposed master trail plan will consider the placement of support facilities such as interpretive panels, overlooks, benches and trash receptacles and restrooms, as appropriate.

Standard No. 13. Barrier-Free Access: The proposed master trail plan will incorporate plans for wheelchair accessible facilities and will also incorporate other features required by applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines regarding disabled access.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The Santa Cruz County General Plan/Local Coastal Plan (LCP) contains several general policies that support the proposed project.

Objective 7.6 directs the County to “establish a countywide system of hiking, bicycling and equestrian trails which provides access to and connects the various parks, recreation areas, beaches and urban areas.” Objective 7.6 also directs the County to “link the County trail system with the proposed state trail system between the state parks, adjoining counties, and cities within the County.” The proposed master trail plan will identify potential trail alignments for a countywide network of bicycling and pedestrian pathways that maximize access to coastal recreational areas. The master plan will identify routes that link existing county trails to the California Coastal Trail/MBSST Network and provide a continuous pathway through the coastal cities within the County.

Objective 7.6.9a. directs the County “to establish a program to develop and implement a public countywide Trails Master Plan.” The SCCRTC will use Conservancy funds to develop the plan.

Objective 7.7a directs the County “to maximize public use and enjoyment of coastal recreation resources for all people, including those with disabilities, while protecting those resources from

the adverse impacts of overuse.” Objective 7.7b directs the County “to provide a system of shoreline access to the coast with adequate improvements to serve the general public and the coastal neighborhoods.” The proposed project will develop a trail network with the goal of maximizing shoreline access, enhancing the public's enjoyment of the Monterey Bay's coastal resources, and connecting multi-use recreational paths to the coastal communities within Santa Cruz County.

Objective 7.7.5 directs the County “to provide for safe bicycle travel along the coastal corridor by developing a coordinated, continuous bicycle route parallel to the shoreline.” The trail master plan would identify potential bicycle path alignments for creating a continuous pathway through the Santa Cruz County coastal corridor.

Objective 7.7.6 directs the County to “establish a system of hiking and bicycle trails and bridges which provides access to and connects the various parks, recreation areas, beaches, and urban areas.” The trail master plan would identify a system of potential bicycle and pedestrian paths which provide access to various coastal recreational areas and connect the cities, state parks, and other private recreational areas along the Santa Cruz County shoreline.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or agreed to fund. As required by Section 15262, planning for this Santa Cruz County segment of the Scenic Trail will include consideration of environmental factors. This will also be further outlined in the proposed programmatic environmental impact report. The proposed project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306, in that it consists of data collection, research and resource evaluation, which will not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. This project does not include the funding of any construction activities.

Upon Conservancy approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.